## Old Town Square

### Making a Shopping Center a Community Center

### Oregon Sustainable Transportation Initiative

#### Featured Category

**Support Downtowns and Mixed-Use Areas**

#### Location

**Wilsonville, Oregon**

- **2012 Population**: 20,515
- **2035 Estimated Population**: 29,070

#### Milestones

- **Mid-1990’s**: Early planning for Fred Meyer Center
- **June 2008**: Streetscape Improvements
- **January 2009**: Land use application approved
- **May 2009**: Development agreement signed
- **July 15, 2011**: Opening day for retail phase
- **December 2012**: Completion of residential phase

#### Applicable GHG Reduction Strategies

- Development Types
- Pedestrian Environment
- Parking Management
- Transit Services and Facilities
- Access Management

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**It's Hip to be Old Town Square**

The success of Wilsonville’s Old Town Square is illustrated by some key indicators:

- 145,000 square foot Fred Meyer store
- 50,000 square feet of retail, restaurants and office space with a vacancy rate of less than 5%.
- 90% of the retail space outside of the Fred Meyer store was leased within 14 months, much faster than usual
- 52 dwelling units on a 0.92 acre parcel mixed-use building
- 400 new jobs (estimated)
- Increased transit ridership in the area
- 35-40 public events per year hosted by McMenamins

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*This case study is an illustration of strategies from the Transportation and Land Use Greenhouse Gas (GHG) Reduction Toolkit, and is intended to help local jurisdictions explore actions and programs that can reduce GHG emissions from transportation.*
### Background

In the 1990’s, Fred Meyer purchased land along the I-5 interchange at Wilsonville Road as the first step toward a future retail store in Wilsonville, Oregon. Land use applications were filed in 2003, but were not approved because adjacent streets and the I-5 interchange had limited capacity to serve new development. These transportation limitations and other needed infrastructure improvements were a deal-breaker – off-site improvements were too expensive for the project to move forward. In 2007, the City, Fred Meyer and ODOT took steps toward creating partnerships that would address infrastructure needs and allow a mixed-use, pedestrian-oriented development to move forward. The partnerships were formalized through an intergovernmental agreement (City-ODOT) and a development agreement (City-Fred Meyer) that opened the door to public and private investments. The agreements led to:

- Combining state, local and private funds to rebuild the I-5 interchange, increasing needed capacity and making much needed improvements for bicycle and pedestrian connectivity;
- Involvement of the community in the design elements and public art that was incorporated into the interchange. The City and the Wilsonville-West Linn School District conducted the “Beauty & the Bridge” project in which over 1,000 students helped research, design and create 5,000 tiles that enliven the walls of the underpass.
- Reconstruction of Wilsonville Road and Boones Ferry Road into complete streets, which also created a pedestrian-oriented gateway into Old Town Center and Wilsonville’s historic Old Town District;
- Private investment to create the 195,000 square foot Old Town Center and the 52-unit Bell Tower at Old Town Square (a vertical mixed-use development).

Fred Meyer’s team and the City worked together, and with Old Town District neighborhood representatives, to design a pedestrian-friendly, mixed use center that met the needs of the market and the community. It was a long process, but the effort was worth it. Old Town Center opened in July, 2011 and is now widely regarded as a valuable addition to the community.

### Challenges

**Patience and determination through a long process.** Time is money, and the project required ample contributions of both. The staying power of all the participants is a credit to their commitment. It is a reminder that the ground work for public-public and public-private partnerships should be forged early and often.

**Vertical mixed-use in a location that the market would not have otherwise chosen.** The City took a strong stand that the land use program for Old Town Center should include housing. The market was stronger for commercial use, so Gramor Development recruited a housing developer and reduced the cost of the land to make the project work. The result is a vertical mixed-use building with 52 dwellings and 4,944 sq. ft. of retail space.

**Flexibility in development standards.** Some development standards, such as those in the sign code, were not a good fit without some tailoring. The City’s “master sign program” provided the flexibility needed to provide adequate signage.

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"Beauty and the Bridge" public art along paths under the I-5 interchange

Outdoor dining combined with public spaces
Old Town Center implements a number of strategies that can help support greenhouse gas reduction goals, including:

» Development Types. The overall site design and building types for Old Town Center emphasize pedestrian-oriented development, while still meeting the retail needs of Fred Meyer. The Fred Meyer store is adjacent to I-5. The seven retail buildings are sited as “liner” buildings along the adjacent streets, and have careful placement of front entries so there is a clear orientation of the shops to streets and public spaces. The 100-year-old Methodist church was purchased by McMenamins and beautifully restored – it now serves as a multi-purpose center for private and public events and has a brewery on the lower level. McMenamins also built a new pub and restaurant designed to complement the church and adjacent amphitheater, creating a gateway into the center. Throughout Old Town Center, the architecture is consistent with Wilsonville’s Old Town District Design Guidelines: wood siding, tumbled brick, peaked roofs, and building forms similar to historic structures in the area. Finally, the center includes the 3-story Bell Tower at Old Town Square mixed-use development. The project has 52 apartments on 0.92 acres (56 units per acre), buildings oriented to Boones Ferry Road, 4944 sq. ft. of retail space, and a step-back design to reduce the visual mass of the building.

» Pedestrian Environment. Old Town Square includes: a network of connected walkways; small public plazas interspersed throughout the project, including its key corner at Wilsonville Road and Boones Ferry Road; a public amphitheater adjacent to McMenamins so that the pub, church and public space all function together as a community gathering spot; walkways and streetscapes with pedestrian scale lighting, furnishings, and good materials; and connection of the pedestrian network to the rebuilt freeway undercrossing which completes a much needed walking and biking route between east and west Wilsonville. The project also retained many mature trees as part of the site plan.

» Parking management. All retail parking is shared between the various businesses per the recorded covenants for the property. The overall parking capacity is 4 spaces/1,000 square feet of retail floor area, which is somewhat high for mixed use centers but below what the Wilsonville code required (a waiver was needed). Parking for residential units is provided at 1 space per unit, dedicated for residences, and includes “tuck under” spaces under the building’s second floor.

Key Successes

Public-Public and Public-Private partnerships. Cooperative planning and leveraging of public and private funds were essential to solving the infrastructure hurdles. The intergovernmental and development agreements took time, money, and creativity which emerged from a commitment to work together and patience by all parties.

Establishing a community center. The site is more than a retail center. It is a place for community gathering at shops, restaurants, and plazas. This resulted from a commitment to good design, specific tenants, and the creation of public art and spaces.

Adaptive re-use of the Old Church. The church was beautifully restored and repurposed to be a versatile space for public and private events. The church, amphitheater, pub and brewery complement each other well and provide a cohesive and welcoming public environment.

Implementation of Old Town Design Guidelines. Fred Meyer’s architects worked closely with the community and the City to incorporate the historic themes and materials described in the Old Town Design Guidelines.
» **Transit Service.** Wilsonville has rerouted its Route 4 bus so it now loops through Old Town Square. This route, and the City’s Shopper Shuttle service, allow bus riders to travel directly to the Fred Meyer’s front door.

» **Access Management.** The primary access on Boones Ferry Road is located well away from the interchange, and anchored by the church. It also creates a signalized intersection which organizes traffic movements for the adjacent retail center and emphasizes the historic church as a gateway building.

» **Sustainability features.** The project includes extensive use of landscaped storm water planters. It also has electric charging stations, solar panels on the Fred Meyer roof and skylights within the Fred Meyer building.

### Financing Mechanisms

**Public Private Partnership.** The development agreement for Old Town Square describes, in detail, responsibilities for specific infrastructure improvements by Fred Meyer, the City, and ODOT. The agreement uses a mix of direct obligations for specified improvements, system development charge (SDC) payments, credits for SDCs, reimbursements, and other finance instruments. Local Improvement District funds and urban renewal funds were a part of the financing package. Some improvements are tied to a determination of “rough proportionality” of the retail center’s impact on surrounding public facilities.

### Conclusions

The Old Town Square project had all the makings of a successful retail center: visibility, large acreage, and ample pass-by traffic. But congestion and lack of a complete transportation system can sometimes be “retail’s biggest competitor,” as it proved to be for this site. Working together, the City, Fred Meyer, and ODOT were able to craft a foundation of mutual interest, leverage each other’s resources, and design a new vision for the site. The result is a mixed-use, pedestrian friendly center that works for retail, works for the surrounding community, and makes a contribution toward reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

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1. PSU Center for Population Research, 2012 certified population inside city limits. [https://www.pdx.edu/prc/population-estimates-0](https://www.pdx.edu/prc/population-estimates-0)
2. Wilsonville Transportation System Plan, 2035 Household Projection (12750 households) converted to population.